Research Proposal of the Thesis Entitled

Negotiating Thirdspace in Mumbai: An Interplay of Heterotopia, Radical Openness, and Liminality in Thrity Umrigar's Select Novels

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Introduction:

Bombay, now known as Mumbai, is the capital city of Maharashtra. The residential people of this city are called Mumbeiker. The city's name was officially changed to Mumbai. It was known as Bombay during the British Colonial period. Still, in 1995, the Shiv Sena party wanted to change the citys name to Mara tha Heritage, so they named it as a tribute to a goddess, *Mumbadevi*. However, the name Bombay remains commonly used (Ajmal 2022).

Nowadays, it is evident that urbanisation and industrialisation are diminishing cultural traditions. This paper examines this problem through the character which Thrity Umrigar depicts in her novel Mumbai is a cosmopolitan city, it is famous for its cosmopolitan atmosphere, markets, fashion, and film industries, and iconic landmarks. Living in a city for a considerable amount of time makes one feel connected to it, even if he/she originally belonged to a different city. As one spends more time in a city, she or he starts to develop an emotional connection with it. However, modern-day cities are changing rapidly, and this development is affecting somewhere in lives of residents. Looking at things through the lens of literature helps to provide various insights into city life and reveals unexplored truths.

Mumbai is a city that attracts people from all walks of life who come to fulfil their dreams or pursue their studies. Some visit to earn money, but they may encounter challenges as outsiders. Thrity Umrigar, a writer from the diaspora, expresses a sentimental attachment to her hometown in her novels. Additionally, the paper will explore Umrigars novel through concepts such as heterotopia, introduced by Michel Foucault, radical openness by bell hooks, and liminality, as described by Victor Turner.

Introduction to the Author and the Works

Thrity Umrigar is an Indo-American writer born in Mumbai to a Parsi family**.** She has written novels that are relevant in a literary context because of their themes, most of them are set in or

related to Mumbai, exploring themes such as memory, culture, trauma, nostalgia, and identity. Readers can observe Indian cultural elements in the novel by a diasporic author. In her stories, the city of Mumbai is mirrored through her eyes. She has described the local flavour using native words in her novels. The present study attempts to deal with the city of Mumbai and its varied themes including hybrid identities, gender, and cosmopolitanism. The city becomes a living character that affects all the components within it.

Thrity Umrigar shows a vivid picture of Mumbai, in her first novel *Bombay Time* (2001), which portrays the lives of friends who reside in a Parsi apartment building in Mumbai. This story explores the various themes of generational differences and choices of life as the friends gather in the reception area and talk about their days in Wadia Baug Mumbai. Through their stories, the novel reveals the changing face of the city of Mumbai through the generations. At the beginning of the story, Umrigar portrays Mumbai as a character. Moreover, a researcher will examine Mumbai as a heterotopic space with complexities of Parsi culture in the city through the characters.

The Space Between Us (2006) is Umrigar's most popular novel presenting the story of an upper-middle-class Parsi housewife Sera Dubash who lives in shame and disappointment of her abusive husband and her married life, and Bhima who has been working in her house as a household from more than twenty years, the story shows us the very heart touching poverty of city servants, this story is about two different class women in Mumbai. Through this story, researchers can explore how money can affect the lives of people in the big cities.

The Secret Between US (2021) is a continuing story of *The Space Between Us.* Two poor women set up their businesses in Mumbai, named Bhima and Parvati. Due to this business, they shared a special bond and secret that they never thought to share with anyone in their lives,

this story is about the bond of these two ladies and their expectations before coming to the city, and depicts Mumbai through the eyes of slums and poor people.

Umrigar's other novel *The World We Found* (2012) follows the story of four friends, who were close friends during college in 1970, Bombay now known as Mumbai. They have not been in touch for more than 25 years. The novel shows how Mumbai has changed over the decades and how its generations have evolved. Through the eyes of various characters, readers get to know a city intimately. The story carries themes of identity, gender equality, memory, and friendship.

If Today Be Sweet (2007) is a novel written by Umrigar this story is around Tehmina, a 66-year-old Parsi widow who comes from Mumbai to stay with her son in the US, and in this story, she is trying to decide where to spend her life, it is an interesting book about the immigrants who left their place and trying to adopt the new place in their life. The story showcases the value of the native place in this novel and readers can also explore the Parsi culture through the character.

Literature Review

Sudipta Chakraborty's previous work, *Space and Cultural Geography: A Study of V.S. Naipaul's Representation of India in His Travel Narratives* (2014) explores Michel Foucault's concept of heterotopia as it relates to Naipaul's writings. In the first chapter, Chakraborty discusses the politics of space and spatialisation examining how Naipaul's work introduces the symbol of material dimensions of Indian spaces these texts present the socio-political reality of India. The second chapter focuses on postmodern heterotopologies and cultural geography, where he examines the ideas of Edward Soja and Henri Lefebvre. Soja introduces the concept of "thirdspace" in his book *THIRDSPACE: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996), drawing on Lefebvre's thoughts Chakraborty align Naipaul's work

with Soja's perception of thirdspace where the heterotopia plays between traditional and modernity. In the third chapter, Chakrabortys analysis shows that some spaces in Naipaul 's stories are examples of heterotopias of abjection, this concept arrived from Julia Kristeva's thoughts on impurity and being different from society. Furthermore, in chapter four he discusses discourses of heterotopia in another of Naipaul's works *A Study of India: A Wounded Civilization* (2011). Chakraborty concentrates on the different places within Naipauls view of Indian cities—the countrys growing cities where the colonial history, class struggles and religious identities meet and conflict. Mumbai is depicted as a place where people have hope for economic success but also face social divisions. it shows the complex culture of postcolonial India.

By recognising the Selwyn Cudjoe and Edward Said argument Chakraborty defends Naipauls portrayal of Indian heterotopias as a genuine exploration of the intricacies, his heterotopias are not unchanging, they show the environments where identity and memory challenge both colonial and national ideas. In conclusion, this research argues that Naipaul's travel writing about India explores how different places reflect wider cultural and political issues. This work shows how India is a mix of different areas, rather than a single national story. these spaces reveal the after-colonial life and showcase how space, identity and power interact.

In the dissertation *Delhiscapes: A Study of Multiple Representations of the City* (2017) Sethi Rachna examines the representation of Delhi in Indian English literature in the post-colonial era. For this, she uses some spatial theories by Edward Soja, Lefebvre, and Foucault. She examines Sojas theory of thirdspace which shows the geographically present space, imagined place and their synthesis, Lefebvre idea of space and social construct, and Foucaults idea of heterotopia and utopia.

This paper explores the identities in Delhi, addressing the citys history and literature after the colonial period. Explores topics like City and Identity, City and Gender, City as a Capital, and City as a Brand, which focus on the changing dynamics of the city, and the nostalgia experienced which is felt by the residents because of the rapid changes of the city. this work helps to understand the relation between city and residents.

Kalpana Bora's paper *Metropolis Bombay: Spatial Representations in Contemporary Indian Fiction in English* (2013), examines the growth of the city of Mumbai through the lens of literature and explores the relationship between identity and environment. By using Edward Soja's theory of thirdspace and some postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha, this study analyses the spatial dynamics of the city and the hybridity issue in the post-colonial era. And focusing on the globalization impact has on the city.

The thesis explores literary works, cosmopolitan themes in Salman Rushdie's *Midnights Children* (1981) and Shama Futehallys *Tara Lane* (1993), marginality in Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* (1995) and Kiran Nagarkar's *Ravan and Eddie* (1994), and urban networks in Vikram Chandras *Sacred Games* (1996), and Murzban Shroffs *Breathless in Bombay* (2008). Moreover, it highlights how the writer of the work depends on the reader's view and understanding of the place while calling for more exploration of the interaction of spatial theory and postcolonial feminism.

The City Speaks: Urban Spaces in Indian Literature (2022), Edited by Subashish Bhattacharjee and Goutam Karmakar, shows the connection between urban studies and literature, this connection offers a captivating view of the connection between cities and their writers. This book discovers this interplay in the framework of Indian literature. It explores how all kinds of Indian writers present their place in their writing and how this influences the readers.

The book offers Western urban theoretical contexts to draw on theorists like Henri Lefebvre, Walter Benjamin, and David Harvey with the view of South Asian thinkers such as Arjun Appadurai and Ashis Nandy. The key ideas include Lefebvres *The Production of Space* (1974) and Ashis Nandy's idea of a critique of modernity through this analysis of cities such as Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Bangalore. Offering the cities as a dynamic character in the literary works. Bhattacharjee and Karmakar encounter dominant Western urban narratives by showing the different urban experiences of India. This study encounters a new connection between urban studies and literature.

Socio-Cultural Interpretations of the Gendered Selves in the Select Novels of Thrity Umrigar (2021) paper by Daryl Cressida, she examines Umrigar's works *Bombay Time* (2002), *The Secret Between Us* (2018), *The Story Hour* (2014), and *If Today Be Sweet* (2007) and explores gendered identities in the city of Mumbai. Cressida shows how the social culture and patriarchy shape the perceptions of the characters and their interactions. This paper highlights how the place of family and friends affects the identities of residents by using Edward Soja's thirdspace theory. This paper examines the conflict of dynamics of identity in post-colonial urban settings. The ultimate aim is to understand the social factors surrounding gender identity in Umrigar's novels. Moreover, this paper suggests more research on areas such as heterotopia, radical openness and liminality for further research.

Poonam Kimta's previous research papers titled, *Negotiating the Home: A Study of Six Novels by Contemporary Indian Women Writers* (2013), explore Mumbai through the work of Anita Desai, Rama Mehta, Namita Gokhale, Githa Hariharan, Manju Kapur, and Thrity Umrigar. This paper explores urbanisation, identity issues and space. It shows how urban lifestyle shapes individuals and communities, a paper focusing particularly on female characters which is about seeking happiness and identity in their place which they call home.

This study shows the context defining the word home as a social and emotional space. The idea of thinkers like Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph. The paper highlights the complex between patriarchal home rules and womens desires and the argument for womens individuality. Furthermore, it highlights the broader change in society. Kimta highlights the connection between gender and space, representing the womens experiences and domestic settings and providing the vision of socio-cultural readings of gender in Indian literature.

Bell Hookss essay "Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness" (1989), examines the connection between race, class and gender encouraging the creation of marginal space that raises the transformative dialogue and action. Rather than watching marginality as a disadvantage, she points to it as a place where oppressed groups can challenge the dominant society and express their experiences. This encourages individuals to judge their condition within the power structures encouraged by intersecting identities, this kind of self-awareness is very important for examining hegemonic practices. Bell Hook highlights the role of language as an oppressive force and a tool for liberation, encouraging marginalised voices of people and creating a language that authentically presents their experiences.

Furthermore, this essay also highlights the importance of memory in understanding present-day struggles. Advocates for critical memory of past nostalgia but for informing the future action. The essay calls for solidarity among marginalised communities and stresses that these collective efforts make some change in society and the system. Overall, Hook's work is for social justice and showcasing insights into the politics of location, the power of language, and the need for memory to use for future justice for creating a more impartial world.

The book *Identity of Cities and City of Identities* (2020), written by Ali Cheshmehzangi, examines the complex concept of urban identity in the face of modern challenges. This book is

divided into seven chapters; it's about how identities are formed, continued and transformed in urban settings. The book starts with an introduction to identity, identifying four key dimensions personal, social, cultural, and locational. Cheshmehzangi discussed the negotiation of identities in urban spaces, and the roles of cultural practices in social interactions.

These chapters highlight the formation of current trends in urban identity and studies of cities that effectively hold their unique characteristics in globalisation and modernisation. Primary focus is placed on how globalisation and technology affect urban identity. In conclusion, Cheshmehzangi advocates for strategies in urban planning that value divorce identities, promoting more approaches to the urban fabric.

Objective of the Study

A city is a reflection of residents emotions and identity, representing where they come from. In modern times, every human being is witnessing numerous changes in cities due to urbanisation and industrialisation. The researcher will explore changes through a literary lens. This study will explore the diverse sights of Mumbai and how literature portrays the city as a living character. also delve into how historical events have influenced the present day, and how this has led to generational gaps amongst the people. Aim to cover all aspects useful in representing the city of Mumbai through Thrity Umrigar's selected novels.

The study aims to explore the changing dynamics of the present-day city of Mumbai, which raises the issue of identity which has shaped the city in the present day, and study concepts such as heterotopia, radical openness and liminality through the depicted stories of Umrigar, the main purpose of the research is to significance and representations of the Mumbai in Thrity Umrigar's writing.

Research Methodology

The primary and secondary sources can be used for data collection. The primary includes Thrity Umrigar's novels like *The Space Between Us, The Secret Between Us, Bombay Time, The World We Found,* and *If Today Be Sweet.* In the secondary sources, the researcher can include reviews, articles, and interviews of the writer published in various journals, magazines, and books. The information from the internet is also used as a secondary source.

The research paper depends on its primary and secondary sources, these sources give multiple aspects to writing a research paper. As a study of the city of Mumbai, in most of Thrity Umrigar's novels, she has presented the different aspects of the city through the eyes of different characters, so a researcher can examine it intensely. After reading and analysing these sources, a researcher can precisely find out the way to write about the city.

Chapter Plan

Introduction

The introduction of the thesis plans the main objectives and significance of the research, setting the stage for a detailed examination. It traces Mumbai's history from its origins as a group of islands to its progress into a vibrant urban centre, highlighting key events that shaped the city's progress. Moreover, the chapter provides background on the author, emphasising their expertise and perspective, which are crucial for understanding the insights presented.

Chapter One: Heterotopia in *Bombay Time* by Thrity Umrigar: An Analytical Exploration

In Thrity Umrigars novel *Bombay Time*, Mumbai is represented as a multifaceted space of contradictions and diversity, where various social norms and identities intersect. This aligns with Michel Foucaults concept o f heterotopia, as well as Edward Sojas Thirdspace theory,

which combines real and imagined spaces. The characters direct their identities within this urban thirdspace, blending the citys physical realities with their emotional landscapes. The Parsi community exemplifies this dynamic, balancing tradition and modernity. Themes of displacement, belonging, and community reflect Sojas notion of thirdspace as a site of struggle and negotiation. Umrigars depiction of Mumbai highlights the transformative urban environments, showcasing the layered and hybrid nature of modern life. *Bombay Time* serves as a literary representation of thirdspace, offering a view of urban life in the city.

Chapter Two: Exploring Radical Openness in Thrity Umrigar's Novels: *The Space Between Us* and *The Secrets Between Us*

This chapter explores the radical openness that encounters social boundaries in *The Space Between Us* and *The Secrets Between Us* novels written by Thrity Umrigar. Reflecting Bell Hook's idea of feminism and also Judith Butler's idea. *The Space Between Us* presents the lives of two different-class ladies. Bhima is a house worker and her employer is Sera Dubas. Highlighting class and gender division in the city of Mumbai. They shared a bond to sharing an experience in life, their connection questions the rigid social barriers which are called class difference, showcasing the life of women and their solidarity in a patriarchal society.

The sequel, *The Secrets Between Us*, continues in Bhima's life, and Parvati, who is selling vegetables in the market story, shows a vivid picture of slums. Bhiam and Parvati together started a business and a bond of friendship in which they shared secrets which they thought they never shared with anyone in their life. Readers can see the life of a patriarchal society joining this theme with Bell Hook's advocacy for questioning boundaries and developing a more inclusive social fabric.

Chapter Three: Liminality in Thrity Umrigars *The World We Found* and *If Today Be Sweet*

This chapter explores Umrigar's novels *The World We Found* and *If Today Be Sweet* with the perception of Victor Turner's liminality. It plays a historic role in the character's journeys. Basically, the idea of liminality is about the transitional phase of character where they experience the idea of openness to change in their life.

The World We Found is the story of four college friends from Mumbai, they all reunite after more than twenty-five years because one of them is facing a terminal illness. This reunion confronts their past choices and relationships, shoving the lost dreams of the characters. Their emotional and psychological journey connects Turner's concept of personal transformation. One of the friends marries a man who cannot give her sufficient freedom in which she has to choose that she can go beyond the boundaries set by her husband and spend a life with her choice. Second, in Umrigar's story *If Today Be Sweet*, the main character, Tehmina, finds herself confused about whether to live in America or go back to Mumbai. She was living with her son in America and she had to decide if she could manage there but with the restrictions created by her son and his wife, she had to choose where she would spend the rest of her life. Showing the tension between old life and new possibilities, both novels show the concept of liminality where one decision can change the life of the characters.

Conclusion

In the last section, the conclusion, the researcher will review the study and focus on how Umrigar's work representation of the city of Mumbai is justified with the thirdspace theory given by Soja. Furthermore, this section will analyse three key concepts: Heterotopia by Foucault, radical openness by Bell Hooks and liminality described by Victor Turner. Examine how these concepts are connected with the chosen novels. Moreover, this research will show the challenges in society and suggest solutions and strategies aimed to developing societal change.

Scope and Limitation

The proposed study entitled ***Negotiating Thirdspace in Mumbai: An Interplay of Heterotopia, Radical Openness, and Liminality in Thrity Umrigar's Select Novels*** is a representation of the city of Mumbai, limited to the selected novels of Thrity Umrigar. Through Edward Soja's thirdspace theory and the various themes and characters of these novels, a researcher will examine city life through the lens of literature, It is important to admit certain limitations and aims to provide valuable observation in the heterotopia, radical openness and liminality, the Thirdspace, and urban identities.

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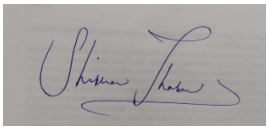

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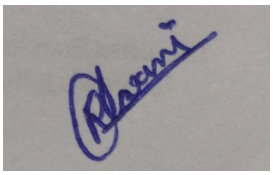

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